



F-117 Night Hawk



F-15 Eagle



B-1B Lancer



A-10 Thunderbolt II

Firepower!!

Aircraft demonstrate awesome destructive power

By Mr. Mike Estrada
AWFC Public Affairs

More than 1,200 people watched their Air Force violently rearrange a large chunk of desert Feb. 2 as Nellis staged its first firepower demonstration of the year. Unexpectedly, people in northwest Las Vegas, up to 35 miles to the south, heard the demonstration as well.

About 220 bombs, 4,000 tank-busting cannon rounds, 100 high-explosive rockets, hundreds of flares, one Sidewinder missile, and 700 hot dogs were expended. The action took place on a dry lake bed at Range 63, a few miles southeast of Indian Springs Air Force Auxiliary Airfield.

Ten different aircraft types flew in the quarterly CAPSTONE demonstration. Showing off their awesome and deadly abilities were F-15Cs, F-15Es, F-16s, A-10s, and HH-60Gs from Nellis; a Predator remotely piloted reconnaissance plane from the Indian Springs airfield; F-117s from Holloman Air Force Base, N.M.; B-2s from Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo.; B-1s from Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D.; and B-52s from Barksdale AFB, La.

The month-long CAPSTONE program instructs all newly promoted U.S. generals and admirals in the intricacies of effectively employing ground, sea, aerial and space forces. They receive briefings and demonstrations from all the Services. Air Force stops included Mt. Home Air Force Base, Idaho, and Nellis.

Other observers included 450 distinguished military and civilian visitors, a

record for the number of “DVs” at a firepower demonstration. Hundreds of enlisted and officers, as well as their families and friends, also attended.

Unknown to those at Range 63, unusual atmospheric conditions carried the sounds of explosions to northwest Las Vegas. More than a hundred people called Nellis, the police department and television stations to report loud explosions, shaking homes and rattled nerves.

According to news media reports, many people thought they were experiencing an earthquake. Ironically, the following evening a small earthquake shook the western side of the Las Vegas valley, causing residents to wonder if the Air Force was conducting another bombing demonstration.

And for those who may be wondering, it is extremely unlikely that the Air Force demonstration caused the earthquake. Tremendously, extremely unlikely – like there ain’t no way!

Crowd reaction to the thunderous demo ranged from frightened to awed. Many were heard to say “Wow,” “I’m speechless,” and “That was great!”

Others used language that can’t be printed here when they were slammed by shockwaves from two big, very close explosions that started the demonstration at exactly 12:45 p.m. The explosions simulated cruise missiles getting the enemy’s attention and knocking out key command and control facilities. Got the crowd’s attention, too.

After the demonstration, I watched two young boys practicing their precision bombing techniques. They were dropping rocks on their Mickey Mouse dolls and making

the sounds of high-speed jets and explosions. Just like the simulated enemy on the dry lake bed, Mickey didn’t stand a chance either.

Keeping the crowd hydrated and fed were men and women from the Range Management Office booster club. RMO head chef and computer shop technician Staff Sgt. Scott Eliason said his team sold 700 hundred hot dogs with all the fixins’ (sauerkraut optional), 350 bags of chips, and nearly 500 sodas and bottled water.

Others helping make the firepower demo a success were men and women from the 99th Transportation Squadron; the 99th Civil Engineer Squadron Explosive Ordnance Disposal flight; 99th Security Forces Squadron; Air Warfare Center Public Affairs, Protocol and Safety offices; and, of course, hundreds at Nellis and other bases who load the bombs, maintain the planes and pump the fuel.

There was also an ambulance and medics standing by, just in case. As with all the CAPSTONE firepower demos I have seen in the last four years, they weren’t needed. That’s good – I have absolutely no desire to be closer than 3 miles to a 2,000-pound bomb going off.

Narrator for the event was Capt. Stan Cole from the Weapons School Intelligence Division. He explained in great detail how the Air Force can kick butt anywhere in the world. The roar of jets and loud explosions, many flown by pilots from the Weapons School, proved he wasn’t exaggerating.

The next CAPSTONE demonstration is scheduled for April 27. Hope to see you there.



C-17 Globemaster



RQ-1A Predator



HH-60G Pave Hawks

Photos by Mr. John Broussard

Distinguished visitors at the firepower demonstration:

- CAPSTONE general and flag officers***
- Netherlands Air Chief***
- International air attaches and their spouses***
- DoD Executive Leadership Development Program students***
- National War College students***
- Faculty of Indian Springs High School and their friends***
- Nevada Department of Energy senior leaders***
- U.S. Forest Service rangers***
- Nellis civic leaders***
- Civilian sponsors of Nellis’ Air Force 50th Anniversary Ball***
- Northern Arizona ROTC cadets***